

The background of the cover features several stylized, light green leaf motifs scattered across the surface. These motifs are simple, elongated shapes with small leaflets at the ends of short stems.

SUPERVISING STUDENT EMPLOYEES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

David A. Baldwin

 *Greenwood*
PUBLISHING GROUP

Supervising Student Employees In Academic Libraries

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Supervising Student Employees in Academic Libraries

David A. Baldwin

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Englewood, Colorado

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To my wife, Donna

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Preface

This handbook is one of a kind. There are a number of excellent library administration books in print as well as whole libraries of business management and employee supervision books. The library administration titles give little notice to the fact that academic libraries employ thousands of students and the supervision literature virtually ignores university students as an employee group. Most authors have failed to recognize that in today's academic libraries, student employees are a critical part of the work force and that few of their supervisors have adequate supervisory training or experience.

The student work force and its supervisors have been taken for granted for a long time. They are, after all, only student workers and anyone can supervise them, or so the conventional wisdom holds. Library administrators are only now beginning to realize how important this group has become to the library and that student employee salaries comprise a significant portion of the operating budget.

Library personnel are, for the most part, persons who enjoy working in an academic environment with young people and with others who are interested in bringing information and people together. Many student employee supervisors began their library careers as student workers, who, as they became experienced workers, were given more responsibility, including supervising fellow students. Later, as regular staff members, they became supervisors of student employees, and then, often, supervisors of other staff. How were these skills developed? Do the library staffers you know come to the job with supervisory training and experience? Are they given on-the-job training? Are they given any training at all? How systematic is the training given to all supervisors, let alone supervisors of student employees? Most have become good supervisors through trial and error.

This book is designed to provide a foundation in the principles of supervision and to serve as a handbook for the day-to-day problems which arise in supervising student employees in academic libraries. Throughout, the emphasis of this book is on humane treatment of employees. This handbook will confirm much of what you already know and will also, I hope, provide you with new information.

The first three chapters describe the role of student employees in the academic library, the role of the student employee supervisor, and basic principles of supervision. The next describes how to organize for student employment and includes information on student job descriptions and why they are needed. Chapter 5 deals with the hiring of student employees. Because federal student financial aid is an important part of student employment, information is provided on the various federal aid programs in chapter 6. The next two chapters discuss orientation, training, and supervision techniques. Chapter 9 provides suggestions for resolving the most common problems encountered by supervisors. Performance appraisal is covered in chapter 10 and employee and employer rights in chapter 11. Chapter 12 deals with corrective discipline and termination procedures. The final chapter provides answers to questions commonly asked by new student employee supervisors.

If you supervise student employees or aspire to such a position in your library, this handbook is written for you. Your comments and suggestions on the content would be much appreciated by the author.

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The Student Employee – A Perspective

Everyone goes to the forest: some go for a walk to be inspired, and others go to cut down the trees.

— Vladimir Horowitz

ACADEMIC LIBRARIES TODAY

More changes have occurred in academic libraries in the past thirty years than in all of previous history. Those changes have been brought about in large part by the dramatic technological advances made in recent years. Libraries have evolved from virtually self-sufficient producers of bibliographic databases to organizations having nearly unlimited access to bibliographic data through networks. Student employees play an important role in the changes taking place in today's libraries.

RESPONDING TO CHANGE

All staff positions, including those filled by students, have been greatly affected by automation. Librarians are required to focus their efforts on improving access to information through database development and management and on interpreting that information for users. They must also devote time to library and university committee work and to professional activities. Many librarians have to meet requirements for tenure and promotion, including publishing.

Clerical, technical, and professional staff now perform high-level technical and public service duties that previously have been librarian responsibilities. As a result, student employees are also being asked to assume more complex technical and service responsibilities. Student employees play an important role in the ability of today's academic library to respond to technological change.

Job responsibilities of staff at all levels are affected by online systems and increasing user demand. Technical services staffers are required to perform complex acquisitions, cataloging, and processing tasks as well as mastering terminal and system operations. Improved access has resulted in increased demands for assistance not only in finding but also in interpreting information. Reference and information desks must be staffed by knowledgeable personnel to assist library users in effectively using the library's systems and resources. Interlibrary loan staff must respond to greater numbers of requests, and staffers in the circulation department are often required to be skilled in the use of an automated circulation system.

Only with librarians, staff, and student employees working together can libraries respond effectively to the information explosion, the technological challenge, and the research and information needs of faculty, staff, students on campus, and users from the community. Success hinges on the effective use of a large segment of the library's staff resources—student employees.

Students As Part of the Work Force

Student employees form a very large and important part of any college or university library work force. Student employees make up approximately 22 percent of university libraries' staffing and 27 percent of all staff in college libraries (see table 1.1 on p. 6). In academic libraries, the number of student employees often exceeds the number of regular staff. It follows that academic libraries need to place a high priority on the effective management of student employment.

THE ROLES OF STUDENT EMPLOYEES

Visit any library at a college or university and you will find students working at circulation, information, reference, special collections, documents, or periodicals desks. Students can be observed assisting patrons, shelving materials, or working as security staff. Stop by the director or dean's office and you may be greeted by a student employee. In the nonpublic areas, you will find student assistants engaged in a wide variety of technical and clerical tasks. If you happen by in the late hours of the evening or night, you might be hard put to find a staff member on duty except perhaps in circulation or reference areas.

Do the student assistants run this library? No, but the library would not function efficiently without them. Student employees are a crucial part of the staffing of today's academic library. Do students do only the work that staff will not do? No, student assistants now perform very technical and demanding work as well as providing for the coverage needed for long hours of access to collections and services. Libraries depend on student employees to perform all manner of job duties formerly reserved for "regular" staff employees.

Student Employees in Public Services

Student workers are most heavily utilized in public services. The charging, discharging, and file maintenance tasks for circulation are most often performed by student employees, with the most experienced given additional supervisory or training responsibilities. Reshelving and stack maintenance are often accomplished almost entirely by student workers. Student employees are involved in the management of periodicals and newspaper collections, as well as in assisting users. Microform files and equipment maintenance and patron assistance are typical student worker duties.

In reference departments, student assistants usually handle all of the filing of loose-leaf services, microforms, etc., and the more senior student workers are relied upon to provide ready reference either at information desks or with librarians and staff at the reference desk. In branch libraries and government publications units, student employees are usually involved in all public and technical service

activities. Often student workers oversee operations during late night and weekend hours. Academic libraries without the benefit of campus security patrols in their buildings often rely on student workers to make regular rounds in the stacks and study areas. These student assistants are identified as library security staff and are charged with enforcing policies relating to food, drink, and quiet. Usually they summon campus or local police to deal with illegal activities.

Student Employees in Technical Services

Technical service operations depend on student employees to perform many tasks. Acquisitions departments use students for preorder searching for monographs and serials. Automated acquisitions systems are quickly learned by students who perform many of the same functions as permanent staffers. Routine receiving activities and serials check-in are usually assigned to student workers. Many bindery and preparation operations are handled by student workers. Cataloging departments utilize student assistants in many of the more routine cataloging activities, such as catalog maintenance for automated and manual files. Student assistants with language abilities can be indispensable to cataloging departments.

Clerical tasks in all departments have become the responsibility of student employees in most libraries. The dean or director's office staff is supplemented with student hours, as are library personnel, facilities, and fiscal services offices. There are very few clerical or manual tasks that cannot be assigned to student assistants. Former student employees remember, with varying degrees of fondness, their experiences in dismantling and building shelves, shelfreading, shifting books, and moving whole library collections.

Student employees bring to their library jobs a wide range of talents and skills, which, if properly identified and matched with jobs, can provide meaningful employment for the students, valuable contributions to the operation of the library, and lifelong friendships among students and staff. The reliance of American academic libraries on student employees can be traced back to the early 1800s.

HISTORY OF STUDENT EMPLOYMENT

In a report of the Librarian's Conference in 1853, G. B. Utley noted that some university librarians had only student assistants and others didn't have any help at all.¹ During the late 1800s, American universities experienced rapid growth, adding new programs in many scientific and technological fields, among others, and adding greatly to the need for research facilities by faculty and students. Library collections, services, and staffs expanded to meet the demand. Brown University Librarian Harry Lyman Koopman reported that in 1893 the staff consisted of himself, an assistant librarian, and one student helper. By 1930, the staff number had grown to twenty-five and the number of student assistants to seventeen.²

Student Employment in the 1930s

Mary Elizabeth Downey, in a paper delivered at ALA Midwinter in 1932, commented on the conflicting attitudes of librarians on student employees.³ She said